

JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH GUIDE





JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH GUIDE

FOR THE CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL
FOR JUNIOR PLAYERS AGED 5-12 YEARS

THIS IS
OUR GAME



AUSTRALIA'S GAME

In partnership with AFL State and Territory affiliates:



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

The AFL gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government for AFL Development Programs, through the Australian Sports Commission.



AFL GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL FOR JUNIOR PLAYERS AGED 5-12 YEARS

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

ABOUT JUNIOR FOOTBALL

The Australian Football League (AFL) is the governing body for Australian Football and, as the “keeper of the code”, it is our responsibility to establish a framework that ensures the best possible journey for young players to progress their learning and development towards the adult version of the game.

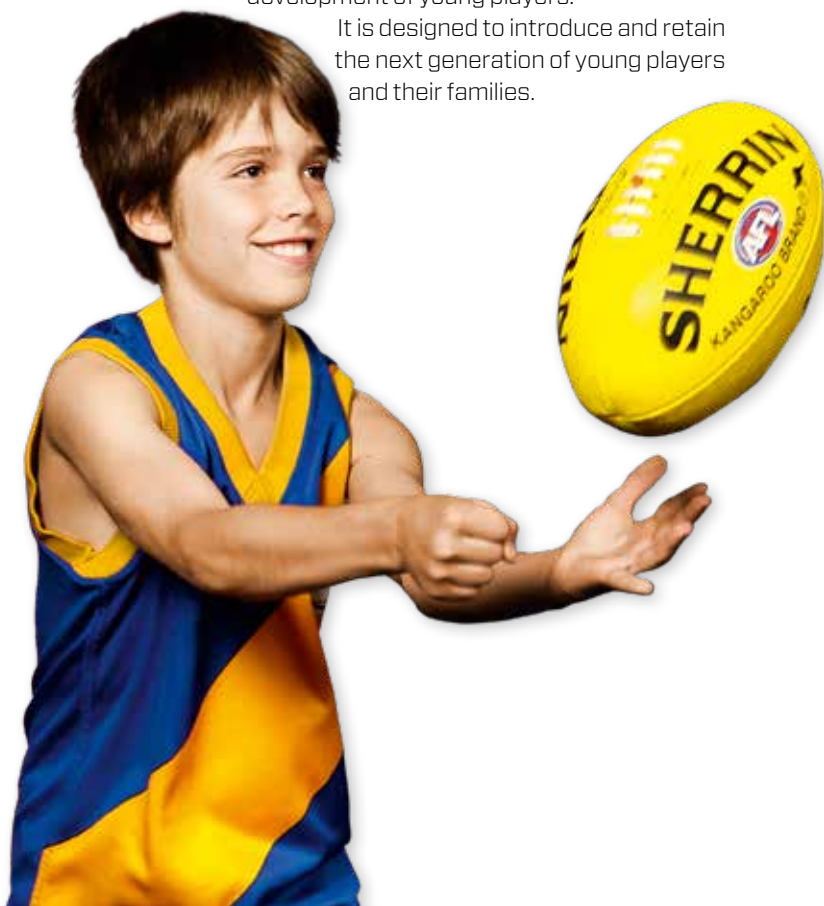
There are over 150 junior leagues across Australia that provide opportunities for children and their families to participate every year. We recognise it is largely an army of volunteers who run these leagues for the love of the game and the enjoyment it provides their kids.

It is vital that providers of junior football are familiar with and adopt the procedures contained in this document to ensure participating boys and girls have a fun, safe and positive football experience that is suitable to their needs.

We do not want to put kids in adult environments too early and that includes large grounds, congested play, unnecessary physicality and an over-emphasis on winning when skill development is more important.

Therefore, this resource is designed to promote measures that will maximise the enjoyment and development of young players.

It is designed to introduce and retain the next generation of young players and their families.



This resource aims to:

1. Provide clear direction to leagues and clubs for the provision of appropriate pathways for all boys and girls in safe and enjoyable environments.
2. Ensure that junior football is delivered in a uniform manner (consistent rules and regulations) across all states and territories.
3. Maximise the recruitment and retention of players and umpires through programs and match rules appropriate to each age level (meets the needs of children – they are not little adults).

It should be noted that:

- » The Laws of Australian Football as administered and controlled by the AFL apply to and guide this document. This resource explains how variations to the Laws of Australian Football have been made for the appropriate delivery of junior football matches.
- » The procedures outlined in this document have been refined over a long period through experience, consultation, participant insights and continual research.
- » The AFL recognises the need for various controlling bodies to determine their own arrangements within the principles of these guidelines.
- » Young people grow and mature at different rates. The junior rules are considerate of this growth and maturation diversity and, accordingly, provide an appropriate and sequential range of programs and match regulations.

THE AFL JUNIOR MATCH POLICY REVIEW – 2012

In 2008, the Australian Football League in collaboration with state football bodies and the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) developed the Next Generation Australian Football Match Policy – for the conduct of the game for players aged 5-18 years. The policy was based on a large body of generic research into best practices for children's sport which had been accumulated at that time.

For some of the affiliated leagues and clubs across the country, the introduction of this policy in 2008 represented a significant shift in the match rules and procedures that were being delivered. By the start of the 2012 season, it was evident that a number of gaps still remained.

As a result, Deakin University was engaged to complete a research project specifically looking at the impact of the presence or absence of the junior match policy on enjoyment and skill development of participants and on the attitudes and match-day behaviours of parents, coaches, officials and administrators.

WHY DO KIDS NEED DIFFERENT RULES TO ADULTS?

Fundamentally, any person wishing to participate in the game should be able to do so in a manner which is appropriate to his or her skills, needs and aspirations.

For too long young kids have been allowed to play on the same size field and under the same match conditions as senior players – it is simply not right.

It is essential that young players are introduced to the game through modified rules and regulations that consider their physical, psychological and emotional needs.

In other words, young players have different needs to adults.

The overriding objective of the Junior Football – This Is Our Game philosophy is:

To provide an environment where young players can play the game and sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions commensurate with their stage of learning and level of ability.

The study by Deakin University involved:

- » Five leagues across two states and 36 matches.
- » Over 1800 minutes of game-time was viewed.
- » 2227 participants completed the national survey.

In addition, the AFL consulted directly with state affiliates, a number of major leagues and many other key stakeholders throughout the review process.

The research was one of the first internationally to begin to understand the experience of children in junior modified sport and its core findings were clear:

1. The intent of the policy was validated by the research – it is good for the game.
2. Better match environments were experienced in leagues that complied with the Junior Policy.
3. It is acknowledged there is value in increasing some of the competitive elements at a younger age – starting at U11 as opposed to U13.
4. The role of umpires and coaches needs to be considered in the junior context with education and accreditation to match.
5. Results of a national survey suggested that Auskick is well understood in the community but junior football is not.
6. A substantial education process and marketing campaign is required to underpin the document.

So, in essence, **two bodies of research and a significant amount of stakeholder discussion over a number of years have shaped this match guide.**

'THIS IS OUR GAME' PHILOSOPHY

PLAYING GROUND, ZONES, TIME AND EQUIPMENT

Kids cannot kick as far, run as fast or process the same level of match information as adults – so why make them play on the same size field?

The 'This is Our Game' philosophy is committed to a reduced playing area, playing time and suitably modified equipment to take the emphasis away from endurance and allow for greater skill development.

With smaller grounds, the players are more engaged because the ball is never far away.

USE OF ZONES

The junior football match program embraces “zones” for the younger children as an excellent teaching practice. Firstly, the use of zones prevents ball-chasing and subsequent congestion where all players congregate around the ball. Secondly, it enables groupings of players of similar size and ability to play within a zone.

TEAM COMPOSITION

Reduced numbers allow individual players to have more frequent and longer contact with the ball while play is more open, even when played on a reduced size oval.

ROTATION OF PLAYERS

Children should experience playing in a variety of positions. The practice of rotating players through different positions and the interchange enables the development of a solid foundation and adds variety and interest to the matches.

CONTACT

Deferring the introduction of full tackling is based upon the need to provide players with the best possible conditions to learn, develop and improve their disposal skills by reducing congestion and pressure on the player in possession. All skills are eventually taught and learned, in an appropriate sequence for doing so.

The physiological and emotional readiness of children's bodies to withstand the pressures of tackling also needs to be recognised in assessing when to introduce tackling. The “age of readiness” will vary from child to child, but generally is recognised as being around the 11-12 years age group.

MARKING

Awarding marks over any distance in the development phase recognises that many youngsters cannot consistently kick the ball beyond 10 metres.

BOUNCING

Restricting the number of bounces prevents players running excessive distances with the ball, encourages disposal skills and enhances team play.

KICKING OFF THE GROUND

In a player's development years, the ability to enhance the skill of picking the ball up takes precedence over the need to kick it off the ground.

THE COACH ON THE GROUND

The absence of stringent competition conditions should enable the coach to provide praise, teaching and feedback when required.

PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

The match environment in junior football must be one of encouragement, learning and development over a focus of “winning”.

When winning overrides such aims and encouragement is replaced by a fear of failure, the program for children is inappropriate.

AWARDS

Awards should not replace or detract from the fun and enjoyment gained by participation in the program and the learning that is an integral part of it.

Participation in our game in safe and enjoyable AFL Auskick and junior club environments can significantly contribute to the development and social wellbeing of young people.

Australian Football must be the best experience possible if we are going to continue to attract and retain children in the game.

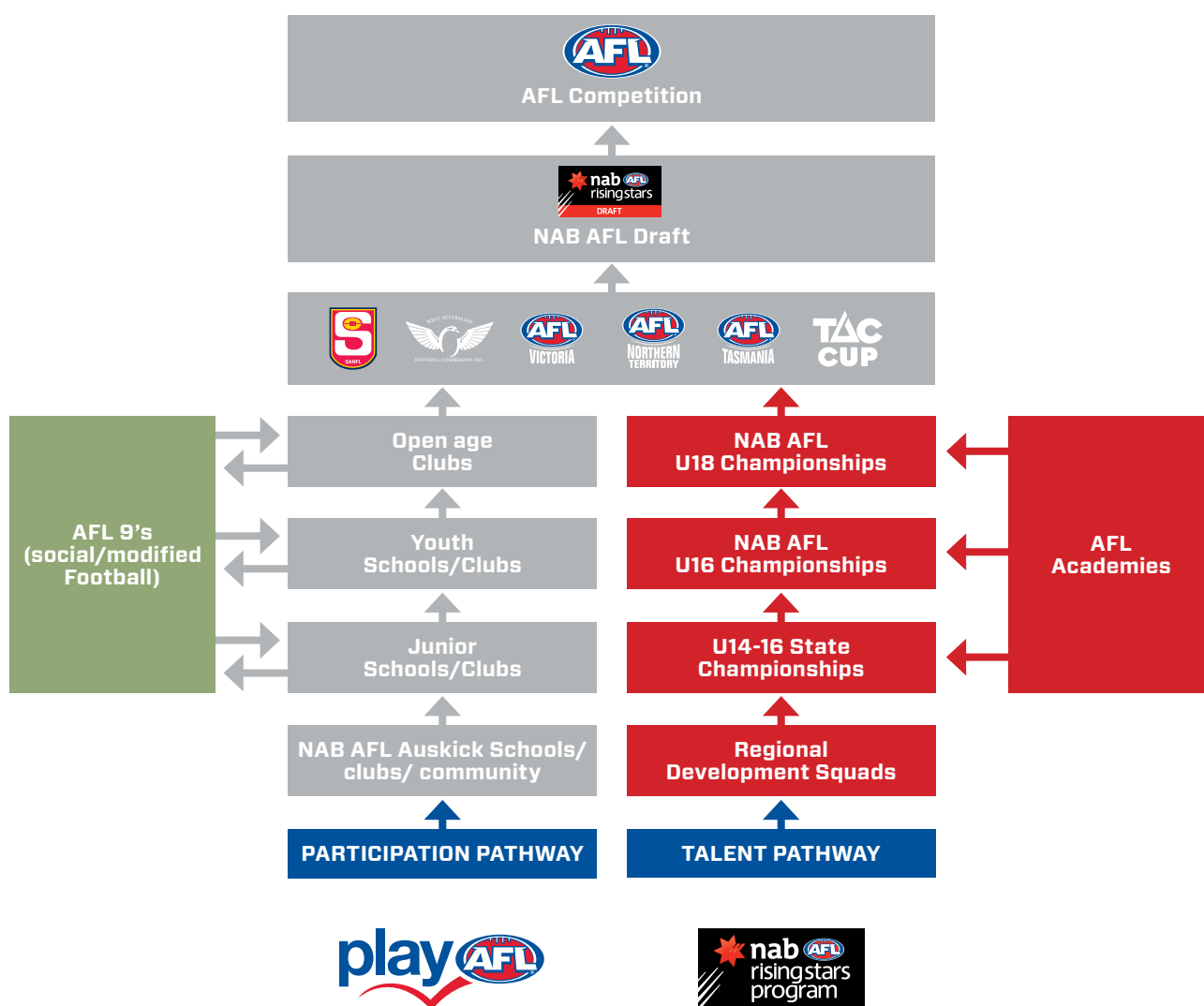
PART 2 THE PARTICIPATION PATHWAY

The AFL player pathway has been developed to ensure it follows these principles:

- » **Developmental** – meets the needs of children.
- » **Informed** – by research, practice and stakeholder engagement.
- » **Sequential** – progressions that link.
- » **Inclusive** – accommodates all people in an equitable manner.

This player pathway provides a quality environment where young players can sequentially develop their skills through activities, games, match rules and conditions fitting their stage of learning and ability.

For the purpose of this document, the Junior Football Match Guide refers to the philosophy, guidelines and requirements of conducting football for children aged 5-12 years with the aim of recruiting parents and children to Australian Football through the delivery of AFL Auskick and a junior football match program.



NAB AFL AUSKICK

To participate in the AFL Auskick program, children must turn five years of age in the calendar year that they register.

The core philosophy of the program is to provide an introduction to that Australian Football that is positioned according to the following qualities:

Fun and Safety: Football needs to be fun for all, but especially for this age group. Research has established that a sequential developmental program for children is extremely safe, particularly when involving appropriately accredited coaches. The activity for this age group must emphasise skill development as a priority, provide challenging match programs and specify a logical transition from introductory level through to competitions at club and/or school.

For children and parents: To further ensure that the progression from one level of involvement to the next caters for a smooth transition based upon rules and procedures appropriate to the children involved. The rules and procedures are simple to follow and supported by resources and coach education. The importance of community ownership and management must not be underestimated.

Managed by the community: The environments at centres, clubs and schools, are managed and controlled by the community utilising AFL developed procedures.

In line with this philosophy, programs and competitions must be planned around what children look for to make it a positive football experience. In their words:

- » To have fun with their friends.
- » For excitement and enjoyment.
- » To experience challenge, achievement and personal responsibility.
- » To use and improve their skills.

Taking this into account, organisations aiming to provide football for this age group need to offer:

- » A program that enables all individuals to experience personal achievement in terms of competence, enhanced self-esteem, social cooperation, maximum participation and skill development in a FUN environment.
- » Appropriate warm-up activities.
- » Appropriate skill teaching in a sequential program.

- » Appropriate skill drills, activities and games.
- » Appropriate AFL Junior Rules modified rules matches.
- » Appropriately trained/accredited coaches, umpires and officials.
- » Support for learning and inexperienced umpires.



JUNIOR FOOTBALL

A GUIDE TO THE JUNIOR GAME

Australian Football is our national indigenous game and one that captures the imagination of people all over the country. The development of our young players is critical to the ongoing success of the code and it is our responsibility to help young people fall in love with the game like so many before them.

The young child that joins our game through the AFL Auskick program may make it all the way to the AFL competition or, just as importantly, become the next amateur player, umpire, coach or fan of the game.

The rules and procedures for conducting modified matches at varying developmental levels are designed specifically to maximise participation, skill learning and development.

We need to ensure their journey is the best one possible and, as such, we feel two clear phases exist after progressing from AFL Auskick.

AGE POLICY

A player must be 7 years old at January 1 in each year to be eligible to be registered with an affiliated body. That player's age group shall be based on the player's age as at January 1.

COMPETITION AGE RANGE

Where player numbers do not permit conducting a competition in every age group, the AFL policy recommends that children participate in competitions with a two-year age span, e.g. staggered age groups 8, 10, 12 or 9, 11, 13.

The *Junior Football Match Guide* recognises that in regional and rural areas the opportunity to conduct competitions with a two-year age span is not always possible. Where leagues and clubs have trouble fielding teams, reducing player numbers is recommended (9-12 a side).

If a league has no alternative than to conduct competitions that involve players participating outside the recommended age span, they must firstly seek approval from their state football body.

In these instances, coaches should endeavour to match players by age and ability level.

Development Phase: To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that further develops their basic football skills and introduces technical and tactical concepts.

The spirit of the game at this level is to give all players a game of football in which they have every opportunity to gain possession of the ball and safely dispose of it by kick or handball.

Competition Phase: To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a match program that focuses on consolidating their basic football skills and knowledge of technical and tactical concepts while introducing new elements of competition.

The spirit of the game at this level is to ensure all games are played in a fair and safe environment that permits players to contest the ball.

PLAYING DOWN AN AGE LEVEL

Junior leagues may at their discretion grant a player permission to play down an age level where a legitimate reason exists, such as physical capacity or disability. Players seeking exemption need to provide relevant medical evidence for assessment by the controlling body. If no relevant medical evidence can be provided, the controlling body will determine the application for exemption as it sees fit on full consideration of the circumstances presented.

PLAYING UP AN AGE LEVEL

The *Junior Football Match Guide* acknowledges the principle role of the parent or guardian in determining that a player should play in a higher age competition than the one determined by the player's chronological age. Players should only be permitted to play up an age level when their physical capacity and social sense enable them to compete adequately at the higher age level. The decision whether a player should play up, should be based on the advantages to be gained by the player.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION

There are more than 160,000 females who participate in some form of Australian Football on an annual basis. The development of a participation pathway for female participants beyond AFL Auskick is critical to the long-term growth and development of the game.

This document endorses the following participation pathway options for female participants aged 5-14 years.

JUNIOR FOOTBALL (5-12 YEARS)

There are three options available to girls at this age:

- » AFL Auskick Program.
- » Mixed Gender Junior Fixtures using appropriate Junior Football Match Guide Rules.
- » U12 female-only competitions (where available).

In accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)¹, people aged under 12 cannot be excluded on the basis of sex or gender identity from participating in a competitive sporting activity.

Pursuant to section 42(1) of the Act, people of one gender aged 12 and over can be excluded from participating in competitive sporting activities in which the strength, stamina and physique of competitors is relevant.

AFL members will exclude females who reach 14 years of age as at January 1 in the year of play from playing in any competition that is not a 'female competition'.

Definition – A female competition is a competition in which the majority of the players are female.

¹ The provision of section 42 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) are essentially replicated in equivalent state legislation such as section 64-66 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic). Where differences exist, please refer to state legislation.



CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The AFL has a Disability Action Plan and supports the notion that every child has the right to be involved in sport, especially a sport such as Australian Football. Including children with disabilities is not hard; it just requires enthusiasm and understanding.

Below are a few suggestions when working with children with disabilities:

- » Check the needs and abilities of the children.
- » Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the children.
- » Every child is unique and should be provided with the same opportunities to participate.
- » Work with what the child **can** do and, if you are not sure, ask them or their parents/carers.
- » Children with disabilities, like all children, will improve considerably with continual exposure to skills. If the activity is the child's first exposure to a skill, have patience and give them time to improve.
- » Introduce the child to a group.
- » A youngster with a disability must be seen as a person first – the similarities to peers should be noted, not the differences.
- » Activities can be modified to cater for all abilities. Children with a disability, like all children, may or may not require activities to be modified depending on their level of ability. Remember, when modifying activities, the integrity of the activity should be maintained.
- » Any changes should be viewed as temporary, working towards, where possible, the original activity. If one change does not work, try another.
- » Wherever possible, have the child participating in all aspects of the day's activities.
- » Provide activities where children can succeed and develop self-esteem.

Remember, all children must be encouraged to participate in all activities – People First Disability Second

(Acknowledgment: Australian Sports Commission's Disability Program).

PART 3

JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH PROGRAM

AUSKICK – UNDER 8s

PURPOSE

To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the maturity level of their motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The emphasis is on the development of fundamental movement skills (ABCs of athleticism – Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed) and basic game specific skills (kicking, handballing, marking and gathering). The match program for this age group provides an introduction of basic roles (forward, centre and back) and tactical principles of gaining possession, moving forward, disposal to a teammate.

SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Before the start of play:

- » All players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands.
- » Umpires and coaches should ensure that players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.

The spirit of the game is to give all available players a game of football. Therefore:

- » Where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers.
- » Excess players on one team should be given to the opposition team if they are unable to field the required numbers.

- » Coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate (for instance, if planning nine-a-side but only 12 players in total are available: play six-a-side. Or if 30 players are available, simultaneously play two games of six-a-side, or one nine-a-side game with one six-a-side game)

Umpires should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the game while preferring to award kicks to players in preference to calling for “ball-ups”.
- » Understand that the spirit of AFL junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and that “the player in possession of the ball should be given every opportunity to kick or handball”. For this reason, restrictions are placed upon body contact (refer to Contact/Tackling).
- » Attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which players are to receive a “free kick” upon the ball being kicked out of bounds and ensuring the effective rotation of players through the three zones of play.
- » Enforce the “**full possession rule**” at all ball-ups (see next page).

MATCH PROGRAM

THE BALL

A synthetic size 1 football should be used.

PLAYING TIME

The playing time should be reduced to what is appropriate for the age of the players.

- » **AFL Auskick Program** – It is recommended that grid games be played for a total of 12-20 minutes with regular breaks when required.
- » **AFL Junior Fixture** – Maximum of 4 x 10-minute quarters with no time-on.

THE TEAM

- » **Six-a-side means:** 2 forwards, 2 centres, 2 backs + reserves.
- » **Nine-a-side means:** 3 forwards, 3 centres, 3 backs + reserves.
- » **Twelve-a-side means:** 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs + reserves.

Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play at least three quarters of the match.

Rotate players every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone to another and interchange on to the field.

Equalise the teams and opponents as much as possible (match sizes, abilities).

PLAYING GROUND AND OFFICIALS

The size of the playing field should be no bigger than 80m x 60m and divided into three equal zones (thirds) identified by markers or lines on the ground.

This field is a maximum size with flexibility needed depending on the players per team, age and ability level.

A field umpire is needed, there are no boundary throw-ins (no boundary umpires), but two goal umpires are required.

ZONES

Backs must stay in the back zone. Centres must stay in the centre zone. Forwards must stay in the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions (as above).

TRANSITION OF BALL

When ball is in **transition** from the back zone to the forward zone, it **must be touched** by a player in the mid zone. Failure for this to occur will see a free kick awarded to the opposition team at the point at which the ball entered the end zone.

SCORING

Only players who are positioned as Forward Zone players may score.

THE POSSESSION RULE

The ball is possessed by the act of controlling it by catching it, grabbing it, or laying two hands on it when it is on the ground. Once the ball is possessed, all other players must back off **to the side** of the player in possession, so that the player may kick or handball uncontested (there is to be no blocking or standing in the pathway of the player in possession). Decide doubtful cases with ball-ups.

In relation to all **ball-ups**, the **full possession rule** applies as follows:

- » A player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on.
- » The player must knock, palm or punch the ball to a teammate or open ground, and may not play the ball again until it has either been touched by another player or hits the ground.

START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

When all players are inside their own zones, a ball-up is conducted between two centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire. The umpire should nominate different pairs of players for subsequent ball-ups after goals are scored (**full possession rule applies**).

SCRIMMAGE AND FIELD BALL-UPS

Where a scrimmage develops, unless awarding of a free kick is possible under the spirit of the game:

- » The umpire shall stop play, send players back to their zones and nominate two opponents of approximately equal size to contest a ball-up.
- » The nominated players need **not** be the tallest nor the nearest.
- » Full possession at the ball-up is not permitted (**full possession rule applies**)
- » Players should be encouraged to pick the ball up and will be penalised for **diving** on the ball resulting in a free kick to the other team.

CONTACT/TACKLING

There is to be absolutely no contact or spoiling whatsoever, except accidental and light “shoulder to shoulder” contact while running to and at the ball. Players cannot:

- » Hold an opponent with their hands.
- » Steal the ball or knock it out of an opponent's hands.

- » Push, bump or barge another player (incidental contact only is permitted).
- » Smother an opponent's kick.
- » Shepherd.

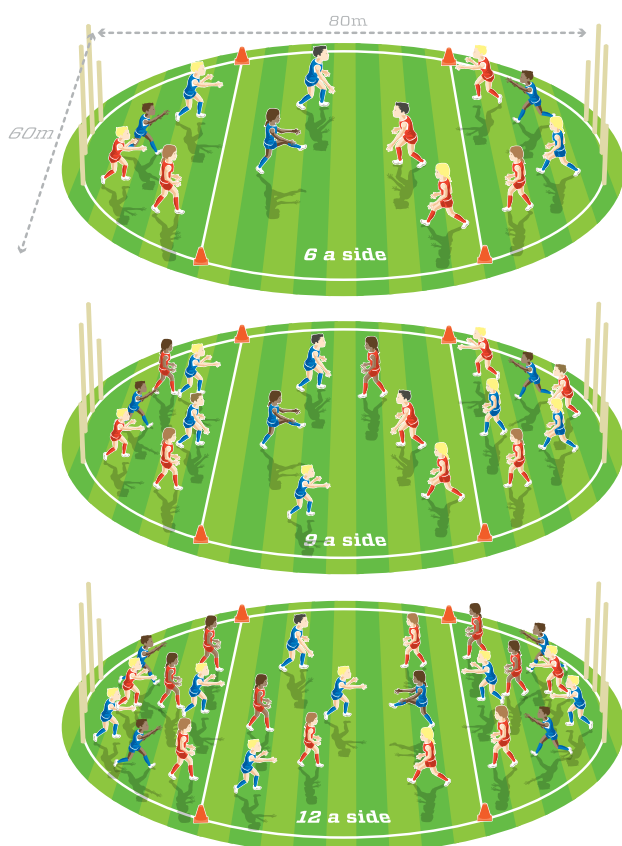
COACHES

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players; they must not pressure, instruct or make comment to or about officiating umpires or decisions they make. The coach must make every effort to stay out of the play and not pressure, instruct or make comment to the opposition team.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.

PREMIERSHIP POINTS

The football match program to be offered to players 5-8 years of age must comply with the modified match program presented in this document, with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (scores) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams should be selected.



Rules & Regulations	Auskick-U8
Phase	Introductory
Players (min-max)	6-12 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	80m x 60m 3 equal zones
Match length	12-20 min total (Auskick) or 4 x 10 min (U18's)
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	No tackle or bump. There is absolutely no contact or spoiling (except when accidental in nature).
The ball	Synthetic size 1
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Parents/coaches
Coaching position	On-field
Bounces	1 bounce
Marking	A mark is awarded, irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled, to any player who catches it or makes a reasonable attempt to mark it.
Out of bounds	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.
Penalties	No distance penalty applies. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.

UNDER 9s AND UNDER 10s

PURPOSE

To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the level of maturation in motor, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional skill of children in this age group.

The emphasis at this age level is the further development of basic game-specific skills (kicking, handballing, marking, gathering and evasion) and learning technical and tactical concepts.

The match program for this age group provides further opportunities to develop game-specific skills and the tactical principles of gaining possession, pressure, utilising space and positional play.

SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Prior to the start of play:

- » All players, coaches and umpires should gather together on the ground and shake hands.
- » Umpires and coaches should ensure that players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.

The spirit of the game is **to give all available players a game** of football. Therefore:

- » Where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers.
- » Excess players should be given to the opposition team if it is unable to field the required numbers.
- » Coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate (for instance, if planning 12-a-side but only 18 players in total are available, play nine-a-side)

Umpires should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the game while preferring to award kicks to players in preference to calling for “ball-ups”.
- » Understand that the spirit of AFL junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and that **“the player in possession of the ball should be given every opportunity to kick or handball”**.
- » Attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which players are to receive a “free kick” upon the ball being kicked out of bounds and ensuring the effective rotation of players.

In relation to all **ball-ups**,

- » A player contesting a ball-up may not grab the ball and play on.

MATCH PROGRAM

THE BALL

A synthetic size 2 or leather football should be used.

PLAYING TIME

The playing time should be reduced to what is appropriate for the age of the players.

- » **AFL Auskick Program** – It is recommended that grid games be played for a total of 12-20 minutes with regular breaks when required.
- » **AFL Junior Fixture** – Maximum of 4 x 12-minute quarters with no time on.

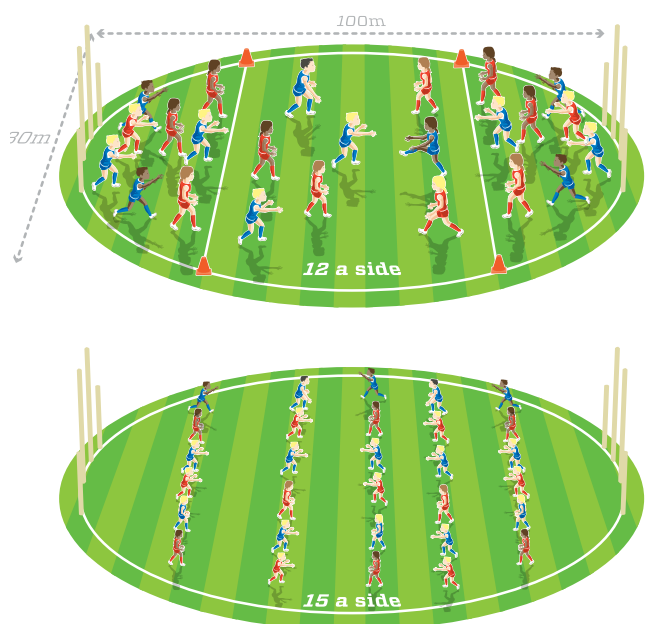
THE TEAM

- » **Twelve-a-side means:** 4 forwards, 4 centres, 4 backs + reserves.
- » **Fifteen-a-side means:** 5 forwards, 5 midfielders, 5 backs + reserves.

Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play at least half the match.

Rotate players every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions, i.e. players to change from one zone to another and interchange on to the field.

Equalise the teams and opponents as much as possible (match sizes, abilities).



PLAYING GROUND AND OFFICIALS

The size of the playing field should be no bigger than 100m x 80m and divided into three equal zones (thirds) identified by markers or lines on the ground.

This field is a maximum size with flexibility needed depending on the players per team, age and ability level. Playing on a larger field will compromise the intent of the laws and in turn have an adverse effect on the development of players.

A field umpire is needed, there are no boundary throw-ins (no boundary umpires) but two goal umpires are required.

ZONES

Backs must stay in the back zone. Centres must stay in the centre zone. Forwards must stay in the forward zone. Rotate players to provide opportunities in several positions.

**For leagues that feel that zoning at this level is not in the best interests of the local conditions, an exemption can be sought via the state body.*

TRANSITION OF BALL

When the ball is in **transition** from the back zone to the forward zone, it **must be touched** by a player in the mid zone. Failure for this to occur will result in a free kick awarded to the opposition team at the point at which the ball entered the end zone.

SCORING

Only players who are positioned as Forward Zone players may score.

START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

When all players are in position, a ball-up is conducted between two centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire. Alternate players for subsequent bounces.

OUT OF BOUNDS

A free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or body, the umpire shall call a ball-up five metres in from the boundary. Full possession at the ball-up is not permitted.

CONTACT/TACKLING

Players can perform a modified tackle.

A player in possession of the ball may be tackled by an opponent wrapping both arms around the area below the top of the shoulders and on/above the knees. The tackle may be from either side or from behind, providing the tackle from behind does not thrust forward the player with the ball (i.e push the player in the back).

- » If the player in possession of the ball is taken to the ground in the act of tackling, they will receive a free kick. If the umpire feels the player drops to the ground deliberately in order to receive a free kick, they will be penalised for holding the ball.
- » A player in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent applying a modified tackle, should be given a reasonable chance to dispose of the ball by kick or by handball, or by attempting to kick or handball, otherwise a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.
- » The field umpire shall conduct a ball-up when the player with the ball has the ball held to the body by an opponent, unless the player has had a reasonable time to dispose of the ball **prior to** being tackled, in which case a free kick shall be awarded to the tackler for holding the ball.
- » The field umpire shall allow play to continue if the ball is accidentally knocked out of a player's hands by an opponent.
- » A player not in possession of the ball, when held by an opponent, shall be awarded a free kick.
- » There is strictly no bumping, slinging or deliberately bringing the opposition player in possession of the ball to the ground.

Players cannot:

- » Knock the ball out of an opponent's hands.
- » Push the player in the side.
- » Steal the ball from another player.
- » Smother an opponent's kick.
- » Shepherd an opponent.

COACHES

The coach is allowed on the ground during play for the sole purpose of providing immediate feedback to players. They must not pressure, instruct or make comment to or about officiating umpires or decisions that they make. The coach must not pressure, instruct or make comment to the opposition team.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.

ORDER-OFF RULE

To be applied at the umpire's discretion (or the controlling body where applicable). Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

Rules & Regulations	Auskick-U8	U9/U10	U11/U12
Phase	Introductory	Development	Competition
Players (min-max)	6-12 a side	12-15 a side	15-18 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	80m x 60m 3 equal zones	100m x 80m 3 equal zones*	Full size No zones
Match length	12-20 min total or 4 x 10 min	4 x 12 min	Max 4 x 15 min
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.	Scoring, ladders, finals permitted.* No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	No tackle or bump. There is absolutely no contact or spoiling, except when accidental in nature.	Modified tackle/no bump. Players cannot bump/push an opponent, knock/steal the ball out of their hands or smother an opponent's kick.	Tackling is permitted. As per the Laws of Australian Football (no sling tackle permitted).
The ball	Synthetic size 1	Synthetic or leather size 2	Synthetic or leather size 3
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Parents/coaches	1 field, 2 goal umpires Club/association	1 field, 2 goal and 2 boundary umpires* Club/association

Coaching position	On-field	Optional	Sideline
Bounces	1 bounce	1 bounce	Unlimited bounces
Marking	A mark is awarded, irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled, to any player who catches it or makes a reasonable attempt to mark it.	A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled to any player who catches it or shows control.	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another player's kick that has travelled at least 10 metres.
Out of bounds	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.	Boundary throw-in (where boundary umpires are available).
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.	Not permitted unless accidental.	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.	Permitted as per Laws of the Game.
Penalties	No distance penalty applies. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.	10m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a player has been hindered in any way. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion	25m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a player has been hindered in any way. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.

* An exemption can be sought to cater for local requirements.

THIS IS OUR GAME

THE GAME – PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

The football match program to be offered to players 9-10 years of age must comply with the modified match program presented in this match guide, with no premiership points, no finals, no ladders, no match results (no score) and no names of players published. Skill clinics and participation carnival days may be held. No representative teams should be selected.



Rules & Regulations	U9/U10
Phase	Development
Players (min-max)	12-15 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	100m x 80m 3 equal zones*
Match length	4 x 12 min
Competition details	No scores, ladders or finals permitted. No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	Modified tackle/no bump. Players cannot bump/push an opponent, knock/steal the ball out of their hands or smother an opponent's kick.
The ball	Synthetic or leather size 2
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal umpires Club/association
Coaching position	Optional
Bounces	1 bounce
Marking	A mark is awarded irrespective of the distance the ball has travelled to any player who catches it or shows control.
Out of bounds	From a kick, a free is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball. From hands, or if there is doubt, the umpire shall call a ball-up 10m in from the boundary.
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	No stealing, smothering, shepherding or barging.
Penalties	10m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a player has been hindered in any way. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.

* An exemption can be sought to cater for local requirements.

UNDER 11s AND UNDER 12s

PURPOSE

To provide children with a fun, safe and positive experience through a well-structured match program that considers the level of maturation in motor, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional skill of children in this age group.

The consolidation of basic game-specific skills is still the focus at this age level, rather than competition and winning, while further developing technical and tactical concepts. These concepts include position-specific and basic performance capacities – e.g. warm-up, cool-down, nutrition, hydration, recovery and goal-setting.

SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Prior to the start of play:

- » All players, coaches and umpires should gather on the ground and shake hands.
- » Umpires and coaches should ensure that players are aware of the rules and procedures to be followed in the conduct of the game.

The spirit of the game is **to give all available players a game** of football. Therefore:

- » Where difficulty occurs fielding full numbers, both coaches must agree to even up player numbers.
- » Excess players should be given to the opposition team if it is unable to field the required numbers.
- » Coaches should consider modifying the numbers per side to ensure all players participate (for instance, if planning 18-a-side but only 30 players in total are available, play 15-a-side).

Umpires should at all times:

- » Endeavour to apply the rules of the game while preferring to award kicks to players in preference to calling for “ball-ups”.
- » Understand that the spirit of the AFL junior match rules for this age group is to enable all players to gather possession and that **“the player in possession of the ball should be given every opportunity to kick or handball”**.
- » Attempt to involve all players as the opportunities arise, particularly when indicating which players are to receive a “free kick” upon the ball being kicked out of bounds and ensuring the effective rotation of players through the three zones of play.

MATCH PROGRAM

THE BALL

A synthetic or leather size 3 football made specifically for this age group should be used.

PLAYING GROUND AND OFFICIALS

A full size field is allowed unless the dimensions are clearly unsuitable for the number and skill level of the players involved.

In this instance, refer to the match program for nine and 10-year-olds for guidance.

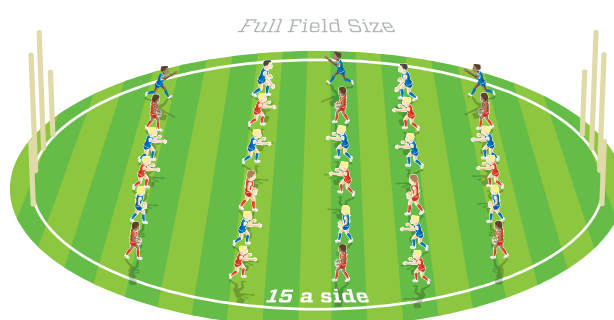
This field size is the optimum size and flexibility is often needed, in particular, smaller field sizes may be required depending on the number of players per team, age and ability level. A field umpire is needed.

THE TEAM

- » **Fifteen-a-side means:** 5 forwards, 5 centres, 5 backs + reserves.
- » **Eighteen-a-side means:** 6 forwards, 6 midfielders, 6 backs + reserves.

Interchange may take place at any time, but all players must play at least half the match.

Equalise the teams and opponents as much as possible (match sizes, abilities). Rotate players every quarter to provide opportunities in several positions.



PLAYING TIME

» **Junior Football Fixture** – maximum of 4 x 15-minute quarters with no time on.

START OF PLAY AND RESTARTING AFTER A GOAL

When all players are in their own positions, a ball-up is conducted between two centre players of similar height as nominated by the umpire in the centre of the ground.

Only centre line players attend centre bounces (20 metres clearance from all other players). The umpire is to enforce a similar 20-metre area for field bounces.

No more than three players from each team shall be closer to the ball-up than approximately 20 metres.

(Note: there is no requirement to have a centre square marked on the ground).

SCRIMMAGE AND FIELD BALL-UPS

Conducted between two players of equal size selected by the umpire. Before the throw-up, the umpire should clear the area by sending players back to their positions. No more than three players from each team shall be closer to the ball-up than approximately 20 metres (**full possession rule applies**).

OUT OF BOUNDS

A free kick is awarded against the player who last kicked the ball.

If there is doubt, or if the ball came off hands or body, the umpire shall call a ball-up five metres to 10 metres in from the boundary. Full possession at the ball-up is not permitted (**full possession rule applies**).

CONTACT/TACKLING

Full tackling rules as per the Laws of Australian Football can be applied.

BARGING

No barging or chopping past opponents is allowed. A free kick is awarded. Fending off, with an open hand to the body (not above the shoulders or in the back) is allowed.

DISTANCE PENALTY

A player **can** be awarded a 25-metre advancement towards their goal if, after a mark or free kick, the umpire is of the opinion that an opposing player hinders that player. This includes: overstepping the mark, wasting time, using abusive language/behaviour etc.

ORDER-OFF RULE

To be applied at the umpire's discretion (or the controlling body where applicable). Bad language, poor sportsmanship and disputing umpiring decisions should be actively discouraged.

COACHES

The coach is not allowed on the ground. Messages may be delivered by a runner. However, the runner must abide by the procedure of going directly to the player involved, delivering the message and returning directly to the coaching bench.

At the end of the game, all players and coaches should gather on the ground and shake hands. The umpire should also take this opportunity to address the players.

THE GAME – PREMIERSHIP POINTS COMPETITIONS

The football program to be offered to players needs to be delivered in a well-conducted league with appropriate development structures feeding into it. The program to be adopted might be the alternative 'premiership' program.

Such a decision should be made by the relevant controlling bodies and endorsed by the state football bodies. No representative teams.





Rules & Regulations	U11/U12
Phase	Competition
Players (min-max)	15-18 a side
Maximum ground size/use of zones	Full size No zones
Match length	Max 4 x 15 min
Competition details	Scoring, ladders, finals permitted.* No recording of best players and goalkickers permitted. No representative teams.
Contact	Tackling is permitted. As per the Laws of Australian Football (no sling tackle permitted).
The ball	Synthetic or leather size 3
Umpiring	1 field, 2 goal and 2 boundary umpires* Club/association
Coaching position	Sideline
Bounces	2 bounces
Marking	A mark is awarded when a player catches the ball directly from another player's kick that has travelled at least 10 metres.
Out of bounds	Boundary throw-in (where boundary umpires are available).
Kick off the ground	Not permitted unless accidental.
Stealing, smothering, shepherding, barging	Permitted as per Laws of the Game.
Penalties	25m penalty can be applied at the umpire's discretion if they feel a player has been hindered in any way. Players can be ordered off at the umpire's discretion.

* An exemption can be sought to cater for local requirements.

PART 4

AFL UMPIRE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

PHILOSOPHY OF UMPIRING AFL JUNIOR MATCHES

When umpiring children in this age group, it is important to understand the six most important things are:

1. To nurture in children a respect for officials.
2. To develop basic skills and playing skills of each individual player.
3. To assist the moulding of character.
4. To build self-esteem through positive feedback.
5. To develop sportsmanship.
6. To educate and seek to modify behaviour that is inappropriate.

THE UMPIRE AS COACH

A junior umpire is more of an on-field coach than an umpire and needs to:

- » Have a thorough knowledge of the skills of the game, particularly their teaching points.
- » Provide encouragement and feedback to the players during the game.
- » Have a good knowledge of the rules of the game as applied to each particular age group.
- » Provide clear explanations to players when decisions are made.

POSITIONING

Because of the size of the oval and the distances kicked by children of these age groups, positioning should not be a problem. The umpire should be close enough (side-on to each contest is the best position) to talk to the players and not have to yell too loudly.

Some players will be unsure of even which way to kick or that they need to move back after taking a mark. The umpire needs to reassure such children and give them time and guidance in learning what to do. In some cases, children will need to be guided into position (e.g. on the mark) or clear directions given as to what to do next.

PSYCHOLOGY: REWARD VERSUS PUNISHMENT

Children, when rewarded for appropriate behaviour, are far more likely to try to repeat such behaviour.

It has been shown that this powerful method of controlling, modifying and developing behaviour is most effective when the reward is given immediately after the performance of the particular behaviour.

The umpire is in a position to give immediate rewards in two ways:

- » By word of mouth ("terrific", "well done", "good pass", etc.) if need be, and if time permits, by explaining what was good about it. Such praise should always be given for efforts to dispose of the ball with the non-preferred foot/hand.
- » By awarding a free kick or even granting a mark. Such decisions can be based upon the situation (courage, effort, determination or simply because the child had not had prior opportunities to participate fully), not necessarily by strict interpretation of the rules.

The outcome is of secondary importance.

AFL junior umpires – The minimum age a child should umpire a match is 14. In addition, they should be supported where possible by a mentor who has completed the AFL's Umpiring Mentor Program.

AIM

The aim of the AFL Umpire Development Program is to provide a supportive and quality environment within which umpires and their mentors and coaches can help them develop their skills and enjoy their officiating experience.

The AFL has a number of education and recognition programs to support this aim. At the junior level, two key programs are offered to assist in the development of umpires. They are:

1. The AFL's Basic Umpire Course.
2. The AFL Umpire Mentor Program or "Green Shirt" Program.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMS

THE AFL BASIC UMPIRE COURSE

The Basic Umpire Course is a training program designed to teach the basics of becoming an umpire and is intended as an introduction to the umpiring development pathway.

It is designed to be used by all entry level umpires, irrespective of age, gender or background in the game. This includes parents, coaches and other club volunteers and is also offered to schools and junior clubs.

THE AFL UMPIRE MENTOR PROGRAM OR "GREEN SHIRT" PROGRAM

The AFL Umpire Mentor Program is an umpire education and development program that aims to use experienced umpires to mentor new and inexperienced ones. The key elements of the program include:

- » The developing umpire wears a green shirt to highlight their learner status.
- » Like the players, young officials need support, understanding and guidance to acquire and improve new skills.
- » Both the new umpire and mentor receive a resource pack and training program and, at the end of the season, the AFL conducts an event in each state to recognise their participation in the program.



PART 5 AFL COACHING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

COACHING PATHWAYS

The Australian Football League recognises that at all levels of Australian Football, the coach has significantly more influence upon players than any other person. This is why all coaches need to be accredited to the appropriate level.

The coach's role is to arrange the best possible teaching and learning conditions in training and at matches for the children participating. We also know that coaches are the primary reason why players either stay or leave football – there is nothing more directly linked to drop-out than having an abusive or angry, bad-tempered, inadequately-trained coach.

Training in coaching and communication techniques with primary and youth-aged children is critical for a number of reasons:

- » Coaches influence the forming and **development of personalities in their care.**
- » The primary years are the “golden years” of the development of fundamental motor skills and of skill learning specific to sport. Not only is this the most rapid learning phase of young lives in this regard, but also **a failure to develop such skills pre-youth is a major factor influencing teenage drop-out in sport.**

LEARNING IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS

Learning is an active process linked to the development of young people. There are:

- » Identifiable phases to learning physical skills.
- » Learning processes change over time as young people gain experience.

Strategies for helping young people learn include letting them:

- » Watch, listen and then experiment for themselves.
- » Try the activity first and then refine the skills with the help of feedback.
- » Watch other young people.

How young people like to learn differs with the particular skill, their experience and the way they learn best.

LEARNING IS DEVELOPMENTAL

Learning changes as young people grow and mature with:

- » Physical changes in their size and strength.
- » Social, emotional and psychological development.
- » Their experience as they progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced levels of skill.

With experience, young people adapt to changing circumstances with greater speed and ease. Key characteristics of more-experienced players include the ability to:

- » Identify and sift relevant cues in the playing environment quickly and accurately.
- » Decide what information is relevant to their performance.

LEARNING IS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

People typically learn more than one thing at a time. In the process of building sport skills, young people are also learning:

- » What is expected of them as a player.
- » How to work with friends and teammates.
- » The skills they are best at.

This highlights the complexity of gaining skills and how the broader social aspects of life also affect young people as they learn sports.

AIMS OF QUALITY COACHING

Coaches aim to pass on to young people a sound understanding of the:

- » Skills, tactics, strategies and rules.
- » Etiquette and behaviour standards.

The aim of this is to help players build an ability to make decisions independently and to participate within the ethos of the sport.

Coaches aid learning outcomes best by being flexible and not overly directive. They need to plan:

- » What they will teach.
- » How they will teach.
- » How they will structure tasks.

COACHING COURSES – TRAINING

The development of Australian Football, particularly at grassroots and club level, depends primarily on the environment in which the game is organised and played.

The following are key elements in establishing a first-class environment for the recruitment and retention of participants in Australian Football:

- » How football clubs and facilities are managed by club personnel.
- » How football activities and games are presented and managed by coaches.
- » How games are umpired.
- » How players are supported by trainers and sports medicine personnel.

The AFL, through its Game Development Department, develops, implements and conducts training programs for the development of coaches, umpires, trainers and other medical support personnel. These programs are generally conducted through the AFL's state and territory affiliates. In line with Australian Sports Commission education programs and sport industry vocational programs, the AFL's accreditation programs for coaches, umpires and trainers are competency based.

MANDATORY ACCREDITATION

All state and territory football bodies have a Mandatory Accreditation Policy; coaches **MUST** complete an approved AFL Coaching Course if they are coaching children. There are no second-chances; children need to be appropriately coached through these formative years.

PART 6 PROVIDING A QUALITY ENVIROMENT

We want to maximise participation in the game. This can be best achieved by providing non-discriminatory and inclusive practices when delivering junior football in an environment where all children, regardless of their capability, cultural background, social or geographic situation, gender or sexuality, can sequentially develop their skills through appropriate activities, games and match rules.

This resource is designed to support such an environment by outlining what is recommended as appropriate conduct of the game at junior levels.



AFL Juniors Online Course

The coaching of children at AFL Auskick Centres is *the* most important aspect of the program. Failure to develop coordination and basic skills is the single greatest factor in preventing children from continuing to participate in their chosen sport, or sport generally.

- » **Introductory** three-hour course.
- » Conducted through practical, “hands-on” involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel.
- » Designed for parents/helpers who, regardless of their football background, would like to assist in running activities.
- » Outlines the conduct of a ‘typical’ AFL Auskick session and how it fits into a season-long program.
- » Introduces appropriate warm-up activities.
- » Demonstrates the skills of Australian Football.
- » Shows, through practical involvement, how to teach these skills to children.
- » Demonstrates a variety of skill games and activities.
- » Introduces the principles of conducting and umpiring modified football games.
- » Offers credits to AFL Auskick Level 1 Certificate.

Who is it for?

- » AFL Auskick coaches.
- » Junior Football coaches.
- » Assistant coaches.
- » Parents wanting to assist.

Level 1 – AFL Junior Certificate

- » **The AFL’s minimum coaching accreditation** for coaching children 5-12 years of age in both AFL Auskick centres and community clubs is conducted over approximately 14 hours.
- » Conducted through practical, “hands-on” involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- » Designed for parents/helpers who want to assume a coaching role, organise activities, teach the skills of the game and conduct modified games. It has a specific orientation towards issues surrounding the participation and practices appropriate to the development and enjoyment of players in this age range.
- » Topics include:
 - » Role of the Coach.
 - » Planning and Organisation of the Training Session.
 - » Teaching the Basic Skills of Australian Football.
 - » Skill Games and Modified Games/Forming a Basic Team Plan.
 - » Growth and Development/Safety Issues/Legal Issues.
- » Candidates will be assessed practically either in course time or “on the job” or both.
- » Excellent AFL Coaching Manuals and further presenters’ notes are provided as part of the course.
- » Coaches are required to agree to the AFL Coaches Code of Conduct as part of gaining their accreditation.
- » As accredited coaches, successful candidates receive an AFL Level 1 (Junior) Coaching Certificate and are entered on the national coaches’ database.
- » **Teachers’ Level 1 AFL Junior Course** takes into account recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and is an abbreviated course.

MEMBER PROTECTION POLICY

The AFL has a Member Protection Policy that focuses on the relevant legislation to ensure the safety, health and welfare of young people and volunteers who participate in and deliver junior football competitions.

This policy does not cover the legislation applying to the administration of junior sport (e.g. tax law, corporations law, stamp duty).

The law related to the welfare of junior participants emphasises the serious obligations for anybody taking responsibility for providing junior participants with activities and/or care.

It is the duty of care of people taking responsibility for providing junior football competitions to:

- » Be aware of the underlying legal issues relevant to the provision of sport.
- » Put appropriate safeguards in place.

This protects both volunteers and participants. It is also in line with being a *best practice* organisation.

This policy covers the following areas and can be found via aflcommunity.com.au.



CODES OF CONDUCT

The AFL encourages all leagues, clubs and stakeholders involved in the game to adopt the following Codes of conduct:

PARENTS/SPECTATORS

- » Remember that children play sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- » Encourage children to participate, do not force participation upon them.
- » Focus on the child's efforts and self-esteem rather than whether they win or lose.
- » Encourage children to always participate according to the rules.
- » Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or for the team losing a game.
- » Remember that children learn best by example – applaud the efforts of all players in both teams.
- » Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse for sporting activities.
- » Show appreciation of volunteer coaches, officials and administrators – without whom your child could not participate.
- » Respect umpires' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- » Remember that smoking and the consumption of alcohol is unacceptable at junior sport.

ADMINISTRATION/OFFICIALS

- » Ensure equal participation for all: Provide equal opportunities for all regardless of ability, size, shape, sex, age, disability or ethnic origin.
- » Suitability of program: Ensure that the rules, equipment, length of games and training schedules take into consideration age, ability and maturity level of the participants.
- » Ensure adequate supervision: Adequate supervision must be provided by qualified and competent coaches and officials capable of developing appropriate sports behaviour and skill technique.
- » Stress enjoyment: Remember that children participate for enjoyment. Play down the importance of rewards.

- » Arrange adult education: Develop improved standards of coaching and officiating with an emphasis on appropriate behaviour and skill technique.
- » Promote fair play: Ensure that parents, coaches, officials, sponsors, physicians and participants understand their responsibilities regarding fair play.
- » Modify to suit various levels: Modify rules and regulations to match the skill level of participants and their needs.
- » Promote respect for opponents: Condemn unsporting behaviour.
- » Maximise enjoyment: Publicly encourage rule changes which will reinforce the principle of participation for fun and enjoyment.
- » Keep up to date: Make a personal commitment to keep informed of sound principles of administering recommended football programs for junior players.



PLAYERS

- » Play by the rules: They are for the good of all.
- » Never argue with an official: If you disagree, discuss the matter with your coach or teacher after the game.
- » Control your temper: Verbal abuse or racial or religious vilification of other players, or provoking an opponent or the other team is never appropriate.
- » Be a good sport: Applaud all good plays by your team, opponent or the other team.
- » Treat all players fairly: Treat all players as you would like to be treated. Do not interfere with, bully or take unfair advantage of another player.
- » Co-operate willingly: Co-operate with your coach, teammates and opponents. Without them there would be no game.
- » Play for fun: Play for the 'fun of it' and not just to please parents and coaches.

COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT

- » I understand that as an integral component of my accreditation, I must maintain a standard of behaviour and conduct in the best interests of the game and the players/staff in my care. In representing myself in an honest manner, and without bringing the coaching profession or the game into disrepute, I will endeavour to uphold the following to the best of my ability:
1. I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian Football, including refraining from any discriminatory practices on the basis of race, religion, ethnic background or special ability/disability.
 2. I will abide by and teach the AFL Laws of the Game and the rules of my club and league/association.
 3. I will be reasonable in the demands I make on the time commitments of the players in my care, having due consideration for their health and wellbeing.

4. I will be supportive at all times and will refrain from any form of personal abuse or unnecessary physical contact with the players in my care.
5. I will have due consideration for varying maturity and ability levels of my players when designing practice schedules, practice activities and involvement in competition.
6. I will avoid overplaying the talented players, aiming to maximise participation and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability. Where I am responsible for players in the 5-12 age group, I will ensure that all players gain equal playing time.
7. I will stress and monitor safety always.
8. In recognising the significance of injury and sickness, I will seek and follow the physician's advice concerning the return of injured or ill players to training.
9. I will endeavour to keep informed with regard to sound principles of coaching and skill development, and to factors relating to the welfare of my players.
10. I will at all times display and teach appropriate sporting behaviour, ensuring that players understand and practise fair play.
11. I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators.
12. I will ensure that players are involved in a positive environment where skill learning and development as priorities are not overshadowed by a desire to win.
13. I reject the use of performance-enhancing substances in sport and will abide by the guidelines set forth in the Anti Doping and Illicit Drugs Policies.

Note: This Coaches Code of Conduct is to be signed and conformed to as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to this code, they may be obliged to sign a further Code of Conduct/Ethics with their club and/or league.

KEEPING JUNIOR FOOTBALL SAFE

Research has shown that junior football is very safe. The incidence of injury in junior football is very low and serious injury is extremely rare. To maintain this position, leagues and clubs should prepare adequately to deal with injuries or medical problems should they occur.

Risk management procedures include the provision of first aid support, safety equipment, and having policies in place for environmental and medical issues. These improve the safety of junior players.

DEALING WITH EMERGENCIES

Planning what to do when an emergency occurs is an essential part of risk management. Junior leagues must be conversant with procedures and able to deal with emergencies so young people are well cared for.

Junior leagues should ensure a person with first aid qualifications is available at all junior games and seek medical opinion when:

- » The health of a participant is questionable.
- » Recovery from illness/injury is uncertain.
- » A participant is injured during training/competition.

When medical advice cannot be obtained, the junior league and/or club should not allow the young person to participate.

A first aid kit must be available at training and competition venues. Sport-specific rescue equipment should also be accessible. Emergencies should be formally reported, discussed and changes made to procedures if needed.

FIRST AID OFFICER

For the safety of all junior players, the following minimum levels of accreditation for the provision of first aid and trainer services will apply:

- » AFL Auskick/AFL Junior (5-12 years) – Basic First Aid Course.
- » Community Youth (13-14 years) – Sports First Aid Course/Basic First Aid Course.
- » Community Youth (15-18 years) – Level 1 Trainer/Basic Trainers Course (must include current emergency first aid qualification).

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

SPECIAL MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Some medical conditions may create concern for coaches and parents. Generally, active sports participation is of benefit to many people with medical conditions. However, a medical certificate should be provided if there is potential for the condition interfering with participation, or playing football could adversely influence the condition.

Some conditions may require coaches to be informed if specific medical assistance could be necessary. Common conditions such as asthma, epilepsy and diabetes require an emergency management plan to be provided. Players with heart problems or loss of one of a paired organ system (e.g. eye, kidney, testicle) need a specific medical clearance to play.

CONCUSSION

Concussion occurs when, after a blow to the head, there is brain injury with some immediate disturbance of brain function. Any player showing the signs or symptoms of concussion should be removed from the field immediately and referred to a medical practitioner.

The child is not to return to play (or other sport) until they have successfully returned to school/learning, without worsening of symptoms. It is reasonable for the child to miss a day or two of school after concussion, but extended absence is uncommon.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Playing football, as with all team sports, involves players living and training in close contact with others. While this increases the risk of contracting common illnesses such as respiratory infections, skin infections or gastro-enteritis, simple measures can reduce the chances of transmission of these infections.

Avoidance of sharing drink bottles, washing hands regularly, avoid spitting and a generally clean environment in change rooms is recommended. Specific rules apply to players with acute bleeding during a game. They should be removed from the ground immediately and the bleeding controlled. They may require medical attention. All open wounds should be covered before returning to play. All clothing contaminated with blood should be removed and washed. These measures reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne viruses.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

BOUNDARY LINE

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, the distance between the boundary line and oval fencing should be a minimum of three metres.

GOALPOST PADDING

In order to prevent injuries to players, officials and spectators, all fixed goal and behind posts must be padded as follows:

- » A minimum of 35mm-thick foam padding, covered in canvas or painted.
- » A minimum height as prescribed by the local league.
- » A suitable width to allow the padding to be fixed around each goal and behind post.
- » The padding must be securely attached around each goal and behind post.

MOUTH GUARDS

It is recommended that all children participating in any junior football match wear an appropriately fitted mouth guard.

PROTECTIVE HEAD GEAR (HELMETS)

There is no definitive scientific evidence that helmets prevent concussion or other injuries in Australian Football. In the event that protective head gear (helmet) is required due to a disability or medical condition, a medical certificate should be provided that states that the protective head gear will provide adequate protection.

SPECTACLES

Junior footballers who wish to wear spectacles during matches and training sessions should wear spectacles with PLASTIC FRAMES and PLASTIC LENSES. A band must also hold the spectacles on securely. This will minimise the risk of injury to the player, teammates and opposition players.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants. Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training and/or competition. Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions they consider extreme, due to their acclimatisation to the local environment. The player's health must always be considered when scheduling of junior matches. Junior leagues and schools when scheduling junior matches should carefully consider the following environmental conditions.

HEAT

Vigorous exercise in sport places some people at risk of heat illness. Even in cool weather, heat illness may occur in people exercising at high intensity for more than about 45 minutes. The risk of heat illness is obviously greater in hot and humid weather because:

- » During high intensity exercise in hot weather, people may not be able to produce enough perspiration for adequate cooling.
- » High humidity may prevent adequate evaporation of sweat.

Children perspire less and get less evaporative cooling than adults. In warm and hot weather, they have greater difficulty in getting rid of heat; they look flushed, and feel hotter and more stressed than adults. Overweight children are particularly disadvantaged exercising in warm weather. Children should always be allowed to exercise at their preferred intensity, they should never be urged to exercise harder or compelled to play strenuous sport in warm weather. If children appear distressed or complain of feeling unwell, they should stop the activity.

In high temperatures and humid conditions, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing to a cooler part of the day or cancelling scheduled matches. It is recommended that junior football providers follow the Sports Medicine Australia guidelines available on its website sma.org.au.

COLD

In extremely cold temperatures, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing or cancelling scheduled matches. The AFL recommends that junior leagues and schools apply common sense guidelines to climatic conditions that exist within their respective regions. Sport Medicine Australia has

state and territory branches and should be consulted when developing appropriate local policies to manage environmental conditions.

FLUID BALANCE

Substantial amounts of water are lost through perspiration when exercising vigorously in the heat, hence fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Junior participants do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity. Junior participants must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

- » Water is the most appropriate drink for re-hydration. However, diluted cordial or sports drinks may be supplied. Flavoured drinks may be more palatable to children who have consistently poor drinking habits during exercise.
- » Players should be encouraged to have their own drink bottles. This ensures that each player has access to an adequate level of replacement fluids and reduces the risk of contamination and passing on of viruses.
- » Where cups and a large container are supplied, cups should not be dipped into the container. Used cups should be washed or disposed of after use.
- » Cups should not be shared.

SUN PROTECTION

Junior leagues and clubs have a responsibility to protect junior participants, to the greatest extent practical, from the dangers of sun exposure. Junior participants should be encouraged to protect themselves against sun exposure by applying a 30+ sunscreen in warm weather.

Junior leagues and clubs should also maximise the provision of shaded areas at venues and events, and/or erect artificial shade.

Sports Medicine Australia has developed a policy related to preventing heat illness in sport. These general safety guidelines, which are specific to geographical locations, are available on the SMA website at sma.org.au.

LIGHTNING

The AFL has produced a lightning policy for adoption by junior leagues and clubs. The policy provides a step-by-step process to assist volunteers when making the difficult decision to postpone matches and or remove participants from the playing surface. The full policy can be found at aflcommunity.com.au.

PART 7 FURTHER RESOURCES & WEBSITE REFERENCES

USEFUL WEBSITES

Australian Football League afl.com.au

AFL Community Football aflcommunity.com.au

State and Territory Affiliates

AFL NSW/ACT aflnswact.com.au

AFL Northern Territory aflnt.com.au

AFL Queensland aflq.com.au

AFL Tasmania footballtas.com.au

AFL Victoria aflvic.com.au

South Australian National Football League sanfl.com.au

West Australian Football Commission wafootball.com.au

Australasian Legal Information Institute austlii.edu.au

Australian Sports Commission ausport.gov.au

Australian Sports Commission – Junior Sport
ausport.gov.au/participating/schools_and_juniors/juniors/resources

Child Wise and ECPAT childwise.net

Commission for Children and Young People and
Child Guardian childcomm.qld.gov.au

Commissioner for Children Tasmania childcomm.tas.gov.au

Department for Families and Communities South Australia
familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au

Department of Sport and Recreation Western Australia
dsr.wa.gov.au

Disability Sport unit – Australian Sports Commission
ausport.gov.au/dsu/index.asp

National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse
and Neglect napcan.org.au

National Institute of Family Studies – National Child Protection Clearing
House aifs.gov.au/nch/

New South Wales Commission for Children and
Young People kids.nsw.gov.au/check

New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation,
Child Protection and Employment Screening dsr.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport
nt.gov.au/dlghs/

Office for Recreation and Sport, South Australia recsport.sa.gov.au

Play by the rules playbytherules.net.au

Scale plus Law Resource, Attorney General's Department
scaleplus.law.gov.au

School Sport Australia schoolsport.edu.au

Sport and Recreation Queensland srq.qld.gov.au

Sport and Recreation Tasmania development.tas.gov.au/sportrec/

Sports Medicine Australia sma.org.au

RESEARCH

The *Junior Football Match Guide* is based on the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) Junior Sport Framework. The ASC developed the Junior Sport Framework (JSF) to assist sports in making informed decisions about establishing fun, safe and friendly junior sport environments and experiences for children and young people.

It was imperative the JSF be informed by contemporary research. To this end, the ASC commissioned a set of briefing papers. The papers have been prepared by nationally and internationally recognised authorities who have provided input in their areas of expertise.

Each paper takes a significant issue that is relevant across the majority of Australian sports, and draws upon research from studies conducted with children through to young adults, and on recreational through to elite participation. The papers bring to light the importance of providing a sporting experience that is positive and rewarding for children and young people. Safety, enjoyment, inclusion, understanding, support and learning are pivotal to building the foundations for lifelong sporting engagement.

The rules and procedures contained in the *Junior Football Match Guide* have been refined through continual research and evaluation over many years. The JSF briefing papers have provided invaluable contemporary research to support the policy's development.

The ASC has recently published the briefing papers in the form of a booklet called *Junior Sport Matters*, which is available for sale through the ASC's publications unit ausport.gov.au/about/publications/corporate_documents.

AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION – JUNIOR SPORTS FRAMEWORK BRIEFING PAPERS

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Junior sport models representing best practice nationally and internationally

David Kirk
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK
Wolf-Dietrich
Brettschneider Paderborn University, Germany
Chris Auld
Griffith University, Australia

The functions of sport delivery systems at national, state and local levels in Australia

Chris Auld
Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management
Griffith University, Australia

Legislation related to safe and appropriate junior sport delivery

Steve Bennett
Blake Dawson Waldron, Lawyers, Brisbane

Preparation of personnel responsible for junior sport delivery

Chris Auld
Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management
Griffith University, Australia

Coaching and officiating for junior sport participants

Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen's University, Canada
Wade Gilbert
Kinesiology Department
California State University, USA

Health and welfare of junior sport participants

Sue Hooper, Stewart Trost and Murray Phillips
School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland, Australia

Physical activity pedagogy for junior sport

Doune Macdonald
School of Human Movement Studies,
The University of Queensland, Australia
Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology & Health Sciences,
Queen's University, Canada
David Kirk
Dean, Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education,
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Opportunities and pathways for beginners to elite to ensure optimum and lifelong involvement in sport

Jean Côté
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen's University, Canada

Growth and maturation in junior athletes

Don Bailey
School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland, Australia
College of Physical Education, University of
Saskatchewan, Canada

Trends in sport and physical activity participation in Australian children and youth

Stewart Trost
Department of Kinesiology and Community Health Institute
Kansas State University, USA

Historical, cultural and social perspectives of junior sport

Murray Phillips, Doune Macdonald & Stephanie Hanrahan
School of Human Movement Studies
The University of Queensland, Australia

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE – RESEARCH

Report to the Australian Football League "Analysis of the research and literature into the methods of successfully identifying and developing talent in sport from a global perspective" research report prepared by John Turnbull

The quality of the philosophy and practice of AFL Auskick: the perceptions of children, parents and coordinators

research report prepared by
Dr Christopher Hickey & Dr Lindsay Fitzclarence
Deakin Centre for Education and Change

Australian Football League youth participation

research report prepared by
Hans Westerbeek & Aaron Smith
Centre for Change Management – Bowater School
of Management & Marketing: Faculty of Business
& Law, Deakin University

Examining the AFL Junior Match Policy for Recruitment and Retention

research report prepared by
Associate Professor Pamm Phillips & Kylie Wehner Deakin University

THIS IS
OUR GAME



AUSTRALIA'S GAME